

Grade 6 SS/ELA
Unit 2 River Valley Civilizations Lesson 3

Name: _____

What Do Laws Tell Us About a Society?

Directions: Read the following paragraphs about the Code of Hammurabi. Decide what you think about his ideas of justice. Then complete the questions that follow.

Hammurabi was the King of Babylon nearly 4000 years ago. His legal system had courts, judges, officials and police officers. His legal code contained almost 300 laws, which were engraved in cuneiform on a huge block of stone more than seven feet high. The main principle of the code was that the strong should not injure the weak. The laws dealt with marriage and divorce, adoption, slaves, murder, theft, false accusation, land and business regulations, loans and minimum wages.

Society in Hammurabi's time was divided into three classes, and punishment under the Code of Hammurabi often depended upon a person's class. Nobles and priests were often favored over common people, and freemen were favored over slaves. Punishment could be severe. Here are some laws from the Code of Hammurabi:

- If a man has stolen goods from a temple or a house, he shall be put to death; and he that has received the stolen property from him shall be put to death.
- If a man has neglected to strengthen his dam and has not kept his dam strong, and a breach has broken out in his dam, and the waters have flooded the meadow, the man whose dam the breach has broken out shall restore the grain he has caused to be lost.
- If a surgeon has operated with a bronze lancet on a noble for a serious injury, and has caused his death, or has made him lose his eye, his hand shall be cut off.
- If a man has knocked out the eye or has broken a limb of a commoner, he shall pay one mina of silver.
- If a builder has built a house for a man and has not made his work sound, and the house he built has fallen and caused the death of its owner, that builder shall be put to death. If it is the owner's son that is killed, the builder's son shall be put to death. If it kill a slave of the owner, then he shall pay slave for slave to the owner of the house.

1. The main principle of the Code of Hammurabi was

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2. Which law that you read do you think was the most fair? The least fair? Why?

3. What do these laws tell you about life the Babylonian Empire under Hammurabi's rule?
